

Final Report of the Special Committee to Consider Renaming Airport Road

Submitted to the Chapel Hill Town Council
DRAFT – November 18, 2004

Prepared by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chapel Hill Town Council charged the Special Committee to Consider the Renaming of Airport Road with making recommendations about renaming to the Town Council by its December 6 meeting. Our process provided structure and tools for interracial dialogue, an exploration of conflict as a force for change, and consensus building.

Consensus allows all participants to have a voice in the decision-making process. All participants work together to craft possible recommendations. The vote is not a simple “yes/no,” but allows each participant to indicate the degree of support for each recommendation. Thus, consensus respects the will of the majority while also acknowledging the opinions of the minority.

Through the consensus process, the Committee made a recommendation on renaming as well as nine related issues (more information about the consensus process and details about the vote on each recommendation appear later in this report):

Primary Recommendation:

Change the name of Airport Road to “Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.” and also have separate street signs underneath with the designation “Historic Airport Road.” Implement the change 6 months from the date of approval by the Town Council or by Independence Day 2005.

Related Recommendations – Town Council’s Process Going Forward:

1. Town should plan for mitigating support for individuals impacted, possibly including money, technical support, time to adjust, publicity campaign, information meeting with USPS. Look for funds/resources to help Airport Road residents/owners with transition (addresses, labels, web pages).
2. Thank and commend NAACP for introducing the issue and giving us the opportunity for these discussions.
3. Issue a proclamation to the Town of Chapel Hill: We ask you to recognize that the Airport Road community is broader than ownership and includes commuters and others, many of whom are priced out of Chapel Hill. We ask you not to be narrow on seeing who is sacrificing in Chapel Hill.

Related Recommendations – Additional Ways to Honor Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Diverse History of Chapel Hill:

1. Further honor Martin Luther King, Jr. with information signs saying “Peace, Racial, and Economic Justice.”
2. In addition to renaming, create a room at the Library with a collection of materials honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights in Chapel Hill.
3. Support a museum exhibit about Airport Road that includes oral histories, publications, etc. that the Town Council oversees.
4. Establish a branch of the library in the African American community.

Related Recommendations – Opportunities for Ongoing Interracial Dialogue:

1. Continue addressing racial and power issues in Chapel Hill by creating a racial justice commission/task force to coordinate activities such as:
 - An annual weekend meeting similar to this forum for a committee of unlimited size to address and discuss race issues in Chapel Hill.
 - A Town proclamation of “Racial Justice Week.”
 - An annual publication on the state of Black Chapel Hill that includes indicators of housing, jobs, education, political power, social issues, health status, etc.
 - A seminar series.
 - Public arts.
 - Oral history.
 - Annual Brown vs. Board of Education Forum.
2. Advocate and voice support for the mission and work of the Orange County Human Rights and Relations Commission.

Recommendations that were not approved by the Committee:

- Use a combination name (e.g., Airport Road/Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.).
- Dedicate Airport Road, Columbia Street, and 15-501 (city limits to city limits) to Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Don’t change Airport Road – Rename Library and Library Road, and create a room/collection, possibly in the African American community.

THE COMMITTEE'S PROCESS

Composition

The Town Council adopted the following motion on June 14, 2004:

That the Council appoint a special committee to consider the petition submitted by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro branch of the NAACP and to develop recommendations for appropriate memorials to the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by appointing a committee composed of:

- *Members of the Council*
- *Members of the NAACP*
- *Residents of Airport Road*
- *Diverse group of citizens at large*
- *Persons familiar with the history of the community, the facilities involved, the person(s) being honored, and other contextual issues.*

who would meet to arrange and conduct public forums, workshops, and such other meetings as would be useful in developing options and recommendations for the Council's consideration; and that the opportunities for participation by citizens interested in participating in the proposed re-naming and any related matters be widely publicized through multiple media; and that the Committee conduct its business at the deliberate pace necessary for effective civic process.

The Town Council received approximately 60 applications for the 20 slots on the Committee. They selected an initial 20-person Committee. (See Attachment A for a full list of Committee members and applicants).

In late September, the Town Council issued a Request for Proposals for facilitation of the Committee's work. In October, the Town Council selected the proposal submitted by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc., a Triangle-based consulting practice.

OpenSource's seven-week process included interviews with members of the Committee selected to make a recommendation on the issue, an intensive two-day workshop and discussion session with a ½-day follow-up, and facilitated dialogue. Rather than a more traditional committee style of several short meetings over an extended period of time, OpenSource designed this structure to allow Committee members to build trust and deepen their conversation through focused, sustained discourse, while also fulfilling the Town Council's goal of having a recommendation by its December 6 meeting.

Honest and courageous dialogue leading to consensus required full participation in the two-day discussion session (November 5-6) and ½-day follow-up (November 20). The Town Council replaced Committee members not able to commit to the full process with other applicants. The following members made up the final Committee:

Council Members (3)

Mayor Kevin Foy
Edith Wiggins
Sally Greene

NAACP Member (4)

Jesse Gibson
Bishop L. Gene Hatley
Mae B. McLendon
Ashley Osment

Airport Road Resident or Business Owner (4)

Bruce Allen Johnson
Catherine Holland
Stephen Largent
Sheila Mikhail*

Familiar with History (2)

Yonni Chapman
Aidan J. Smith

Citizen At-Large (7)

Brenda Brown
Justin Coleman
Curtis Harper
Joe Herzenberg
Creighton Irons
Tom Jensen
Chuck Stone*

* Sheila Mikhail was called away with too short notice to replace her. Chuck Stone left after lunch on November 5 and did not return. Thus, the Committee proceeded with 18 members – 7 people of color and 11 white people.

The OpenSource Approach

OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc. helps organizations and communities that want to *be* the change they seek in the world. Our consulting partners – Gita Gulati-Partee, Calvin Allen, Chantelle Fisher-Borne, and Graig Meyer – have extensive experience in assisting groups to engage in courageous conversations about race, racism, and other forms of oppression. Our model builds on proven methods for engaging in healthy conflict around difficult issues. Our intention is to challenge groups to move through the discomfort necessary for change and growth, while we provide a context and guidance that makes this process non-threatening and productive. The team is intentionally diverse – consisting of two women and two men, two people of color and two white people, two heterosexual people and two gay/lesbian people – in order to provide multiple perspectives on many social issues as well as a model for courageous conversations across myriad lines of difference. (See Attachment B for further information about our approach, capacity, and track record.)

OpenSource recognizes that issues like the Airport Road renaming are immediate, tangible manifestations of ongoing unspoken tensions between different parts of the community. The OpenSource team designed a process to engage the Committee in dialogue to address the renaming issue, as well as its link to broader racial relations in Chapel Hill. In this way, we hope the Committee's work would open a pathway to authentic, courageous conversations throughout the community.

The team customized its design based upon information gathered from individual conversations with Committee members and from the members' applications. We also framed the Committee's process with

a set of core “ground rules” (adapted from Pacific Educational Group’s “Beyond Diversity”) designed to work in contrary fashion to our culture’s usual non-productive discussions about racial issues:

- **Stay engaged** – Your full participation in the process is required for the process to be successful.
- **Speak your truth** – Share stories, experiences, and thoughts from a personal perspective.
- **Experience discomfort** – This process is designed to challenge all participants. Discomfort is a sign that you are being challenged and perhaps even growing from the experience.
- **Expect and accept non-closure** – While this process will resolve an immediate question, it will raise far more questions than answers about the larger challenge of interracial mistrust in the community.
- **The process is the task** – Engaging in the dialogue and process of working together will reap far greater rewards than simply making a decision about what “to do.”

OpenSource had no preference for or predetermined notion of what the Committee would recommend. Our focus was to facilitate a process that would help the Committee make its own collective recommendation. We designed the meetings to move the Committee towards three outcomes:

1. Promoting constructive dialogue across lines of difference
2. Sharing and understanding individual constituent needs
3. Collective decision making about the recommendations

Dialogue

Our process provided structure and tools for interracial dialogue, an exploration of conflict as a force for change, and consensus building. Throughout the process, we emphasized to Committee members that the goal was to listen and understand each other – not to convince each other. (See Attachment C for meeting agendas and handouts. See Attachment D for notes that came out of the Committee’s discussions.)

We opened Day 1 by sharing hopes for the day, then moved into a series of small groups to explore (1) reasons for renaming Airport Road in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., (2) reasons for not renaming Airport Road in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., (3) alternative options, and (4) common interests. Getting beyond surface “positions” (what you want) to deeper “interests” (the needs, concerns, hopes, fears that you are seeking to fulfill by taking a position) allowed Committee members an opportunity to seek a “win-win” resolution to fulfill everyone’s needs.

With all of the issues out in the open, the Committee considered the question, “What does renaming Airport Road have to do with racial relations in Chapel Hill” through a “Kiva” conversation. The Kiva is a structured way to have a difficult conversation. It comes from a Native American tradition that allows all members of a community to have their voices heard in a conversation without regard to the amount of power they hold in the community. We closed Day 1 with a large-group discussion of “What does it mean to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. and respect the needs of all residents?”

We opened Day 2 with a reflection and sharing exercise called "What's on Your Mind?" Committee members considered what they had experienced the previous day, the role and make-up of the Committee, and what might happen in Day 2. This led to an open discussion about the feelings and concerns of the three Committee members representing residents and business owners of Airport Road. They expressed their sense that the Committee was stacked in favor of renaming, and that their participation would have limited impact. The Minority Report below further details their concerns.

Building Consensus

Consensus does not mean "everyone agrees." The OpenSource model of consensus building means everyone is engaged in the decision-making process. It incorporates the best thinking of everyone, yielding better decisions. And it allows everyone – including the minority – to have a voice in the process. Consensus promotes a spirit of cooperation rather than competition or right vs. wrong.

The goal of a consensus-building process is being heard and understood. It is not about convincing each other. Participants must keep in mind that being heard does not mean always getting what you want.

Consensus is not just a vote. It is a process. It is a good faith effort to get to solutions that could work for everyone. The group may not always succeed in pleasing all members, but it is most important to try.

Consensus is not easy – it requires a great deal from each participant:

- Commitment to the process
- Active participation and cooperation
- Disciplined speaking and listening
- Respect for the contributions of every member
- A willingness to encourage and support conflict and the resolution of that conflict

A consensus vote is not a simple "yes/no." Instead, we asked Committee members to indicate their degree of support for each recommendation. For each recommendation, Committee members were asked to literally "take a stand" at different points along the "Levels of Consensus or Gradients of Agreement" continuum (adapted from Community at Work):

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> 5 ← → 1 </div>				
I strongly support this decision.	I support this decision.	This decision is okay with me. I can live with it.	I dislike this decision, but I am willing to defer to the wisdom and will of the group.	I do not support this decision. We definitely need to discuss this matter further.*

* Anyone who stands at position 1 must propose realistic ways they could be moved to a 2 or above. No one can shut down the process. After reasonable time and discussion, the decision can go forward with a minority report that reflects the feelings of anyone remaining at the 1 position.

The majority view is respected, but the consensus process captures the nuance of the majority vote as well as the views of the minority.

Recommendations

We divided the Committee members into three small groups to craft recommendations about the renaming of Airport Road and other related issues. Based on our earlier dialogue, we asked the groups to seek recommendations that address the questions, How do we...

1. Further honor MLK?
2. Honor the history and contributions of African Americans in Chapel Hill?
3. Acknowledge and recognize the history of Airport Road?
4. Address the needs of people who are asked to sacrifice?
5. Continue the work of addressing racial/power relations in Chapel Hill?

The three residents/business owners of Airport Road asked to be together in one group, and they requested that Council Member Edith Wiggins join them. Two other Committee members also joined this group; the other two groups formed randomly.

The three groups offered a total of 24 recommendations. They collectively combined similar ones, resulting in 13 unique recommendations.

We then asked Committee members to indicate, using colored dots, which recommendations they individually felt were the best, which ones they could live with, and which ones they could not live with. They identified six recommendations that all Committee members could at least live with. The following chart captures the specific vote on each of these:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Continue addressing racial and power issues in Chapel Hill by creating a racial justice commission/task force to coordinate activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An annual weekend meeting similar to this forum for a committee of unlimited size to address and discuss race issues in Chapel Hill. A Town proclamation of "Racial Justice Week." An annual publication on the state of Black Chapel Hill that includes indicators of housing, jobs, education, political power, social issues, health status, etc. A seminar series. Public arts. Oral history. Annual Brown vs. Board of Education Forum. 	18	0	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous strong support.
Support a museum exhibit about Airport Road that includes oral histories, publications, etc. that the Town Council oversees.	17	1	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous support.
Advocate and voice support for the mission and work of the Orange County Human Rights and Relations Commission.	11	7	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous support.
Further honor Martin Luther King, Jr. with information signs saying "Peace, Racial, and Economic Justice."	4	10	3	1	0	Passes
Thank and commend NAACP for introducing the issue and giving us the opportunity for these discussions.	15	2	1	0	0	Passes

Issue a proclamation to the Town of Chapel Hill: We ask you to recognize that the Airport Road community is broader than ownership and includes commuters and others, many of whom are priced out of Chapel Hill. We ask you not to be narrow on seeing who is sacrificing in Chapel Hill.	12	5	1	0	0	Passes
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Two other recommendations required additional discussion before all Committee members could at least live with them. The following chart captures the specific vote on each of these:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
In addition to renaming, create a room at Library with a collection of materials honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights in Chapel Hill	15	3	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous support.
Town should plan for mitigating support for individuals impacted, possibly including money, technical support, time to adjust, publicity campaign, information meeting with USPS. Look for funds/resources to help Airport Road residents/owners with transition (addresses, labels, web pages).	14	3	0	1	0	Passes

One recommendation received virtually unanimous, albeit lukewarm, support. The one dissenting Committee member said that nothing could move him from his position. The following chart captures the specific vote on this recommendation:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Establish a branch of the library in the African American community.	3	1	10	3	1	Passes with weak support. The dissenting member expressed concern about the cost of a new Library branch.

One recommendation did not pass when the majority of the group opposed it, and no compromise could be found with the minority who supported it. The following chart captures the specific vote on this recommendation:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Don't change Airport Road – Rename Library, Library Road, and create a room/collection, possibly in the African American community.	1	0	2	3	12	Does not pass.

The remaining three recommendations required the greatest discussion and two votes each. The following chart captures the specific vote on each of these:

Recommendation		Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Use a combination name (e.g., Airport Road/Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.)	1 st Vote	3	0	3	3	9	Does not pass. Included in Minority Report.
	Final Vote	3	0	1	4	10	
Dedicate Airport Road, Columbia Street, and 15-501 (city limits to city limits) to Martin Luther King, Jr.	1 st Vote	3	4	0	2	9	Does not pass. Included in Minority Report.
	Final Vote	3	0	2	1	10	
Change the name of Airport Road to "Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd." and also have separate street signs underneath with the designation "Historic Airport Road." Implement the change 6 months from the date of approval by the Town Council or by Independence Day 2005.	1 st Vote	14	1	0	0	3	Passes. Include dissent in Minority Report.
	Final Vote	14	1	1*	0	2	

* See the Minority Report below for further information about this particular vote.

Other Issues

Committee members asked that the Town Council investigate three additional issues:

1. Changing signs on I-40.
2. Ways Committee members and others can have input into the design of street signs.
3. Clarification from USPS about mail delivery if the street name is changed.

On this last point, Connie Blakesley of the US Postal Service's Greensboro District Office provided the following information:

A street name change does not require mail to be “forwarded.” Residents and business owners on the street do not need to fill out change-of-address forms indicating the street name change. Within two weeks after the county informs the Postal Service of the street name change, the USPS changes the name in its database. It keeps “aliases” in its database in perpetuity. So, for example, any future mail that comes to the old street name would be checked against the database and delivered correctly. The USPS encourages postal customers to begin using the new street name to ensure prompt delivery.

OpenSource recommends that the Town invite representatives from the Postal Service to talk directly with residents and business owners on Airport Road before a name change takes place.

Minority Report

The three representatives of residents and business owners on Airport Road – Catherine Holland, Bruce Johnson, and Steve Largent – dissented with the key recommendation of the Committee. Their report follows.

This group objects to the Committee’s proposal to rename Airport Road. These three Committee members preferred two alternate recommendations:

- To use a combination road name (e.g., Airport Road/Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard).
- To dedicate Airport Road, Columbia Street, and 15-501 (from city limits to city limits) in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the consensus process, these three members indicated that they “strongly support” these recommendations. They also indicated that they “don’t support” the majority’s recommendation to rename Airport Road. Initially, Catherine Holland indicated that she “could live with [this recommendation].” However, after the meeting she indicated that she wished to change her stance to “don’t support.” She said, “I can live with it because I know we’re going to have to live with it, but I really do not want the road renamed.”

Their reasons for objecting to the majority recommendation are mostly rooted in critiques of the Committee’s makeup and the Town’s process for making the decision. They believe the Committee membership was biased in favor of naming before entering the discussions. They feel that at least 12 Committee members already had their minds set on renaming before the discussion process began, and therefore another conclusion would have been impossible. They believe the Town Council was already biased in favor of renaming the road and therefore selected a Committee that would almost definitely support their views. In their minds, this prevented the Committee from engaging in a fair and open process.

Furthermore, they believe that the Committee did not truly represent a cross-section of Chapel Hill residents and their beliefs on the road renaming issue. They would have preferred a Committee that was equally balanced between proponents and opponents of the name change. Alternately, they wish that the Town had engaged a Committee process that included some mechanism for gauging the feelings of a broader cross-section of town residents. One member, Steve Largent, said, “If I thought we had a true

cross-section of Chapel Hill [on the Committee], I would have felt differently [about the outcome]." Another member, Bruce Johnson, said, "I would like to see the town have a Committee that is balanced. I would be willing to go through the whole process again if the Committee were balanced. This Committee was useless. Even though the facilitators were great, it was a waste of money to go through the process."

These Committee members also disagreed with the Committee's emphasis on racial relations. They felt that this work of the Committee strayed from the Town Council's directive to form a Committee with the task of making a recommendation on renaming Airport Road or finding other ways to honor Dr. Martin Luther King. They have expressed repeatedly that their objections were not rooted in racial motives. They feel that rhetoric from the NAACP made it into a racial issue, and they object to the process moving away from the road renaming issue.

Steve Largent asked that this letter he wrote to the Town Council and the press be included in this report:

I am a member of the "Special Committee to Consider the Renaming of Airport Road" in Chapel Hill. To date, this committee has met for 15 hours over the course of two consecutive days. By lunchtime of the first day it was obvious that those advocating the name change greatly outnumbered those opposing the name change (I believe the count at that time was 16 for versus three against).

It should be noted that the three against are the only committee members that are residents and/or business owners with property fronting Airport Road. Some of the committee members are not even from Chapel Hill.

I do not believe that this committee represents a true cross section of the residents of Chapel Hill. I do believe that the committee member selection process was seriously diseased. The Town Council knew who was going to serve on the committee and what their biases would be. I believe that this committee is intentionally stacked with members in favor of the name change.

The mayor and Town Council members on the committee tried to lead me to believe that the selection process was objective and non-biased; however, as I look back over the last 15 meeting-hours, I realize that this is just not true.

A great deal of time and money has been expended by the council assembling the committee and engaging the services of the facilitators. With the outcome so predictable, I have to ask, Why are we even having these meetings?

On a positive note, I found it very stimulating to partake in open conversations and discussions with African Americans about civil rights and the abuses of civil rights. For me, this brought about a new perspective of the humiliation and disrespect that the African-American community has suffered. I do hope that, out of this series of meetings, positive steps can be taken to address these very real and disturbing racial issues.

It is now more important to me than ever before that Martin Luther King be honored by Chapel Hill in a significant manner. To honor him using recommendations stemming out of a flawed process is just not the way to do it.

Next Steps

OpenSource shared a draft of this report at the November 20th follow-up meeting of the Committee, and incorporated the Committee's feedback into the final report. Representatives from OpenSource will deliver this report to the Town Council at its December 6 meeting. The Town Council will make a decision about how to proceed at that time.